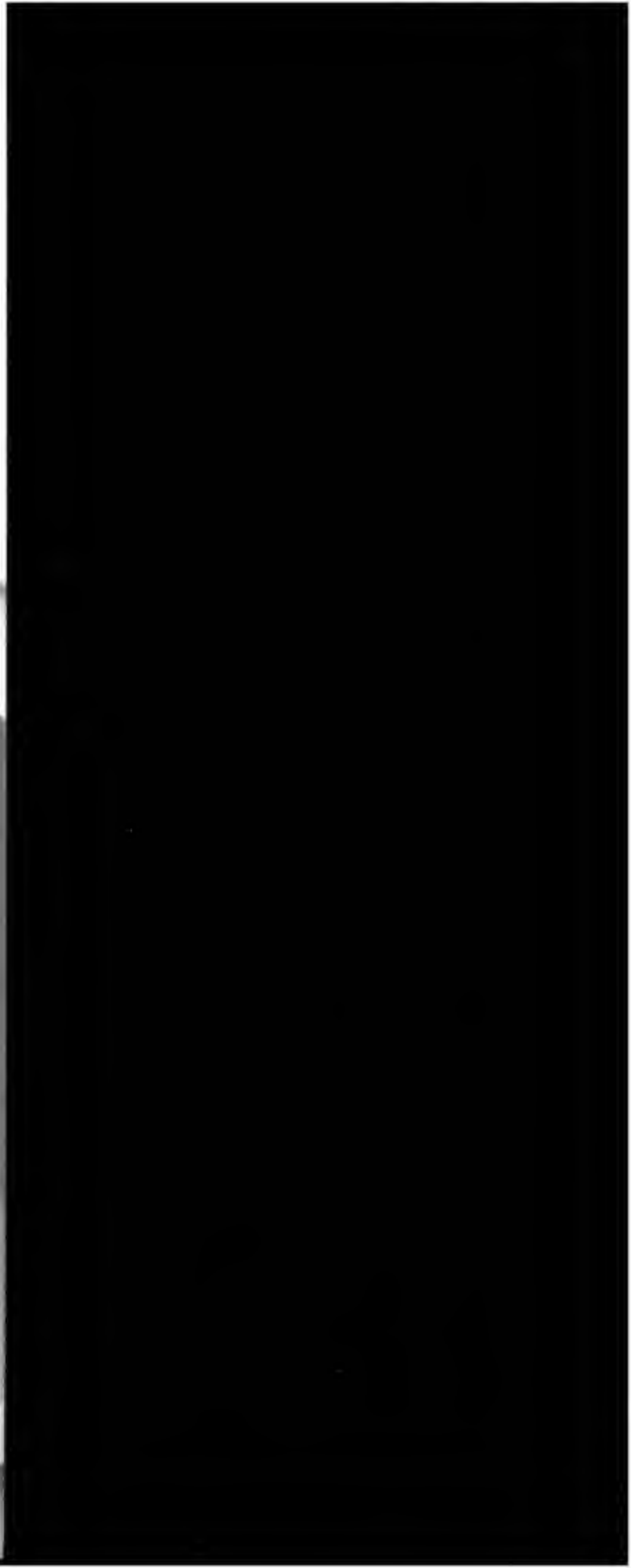


104th Place District

Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks





The house at 1736 West 104th Place was built in 1913 by the real estate developer Russell L. Blount and designed by Walter Burley Griffin. It is one of several Prairie school houses Blount built on 104th Place from Griffin designs. This house was initially rented by and later purchased by Walter Salmon.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

104TH PLACE DISTRICT

The largest concentration of Prairie school houses in Chicago, most of which were designed by Walter Burley Griffin, is contained in the block of 104th Place between Wood Street and Prospect Avenue in the Beverly community.

In 1909, the architect Walter Burley Griffin received a commission from Russell L. Blount to design a home for Blount and his wife on 104th Place in the Beverly community on Chicago's South Side. Although Griffin later received international acclaim for his design of the city of Canberra in Australia, he is best remembered in this country as a talented Prairie school architect. Prairie school designs gained popularity in the early twentieth century and had a profound effect on the development of American residential architecture. The commission from Blount to Griffin and subsequent dealings between the two men left Chicago's Beverly community, especially that block of 104th Place between Prospect Avenue and Wood Street, with the greatest concentration of Prairie school architecture in the city.

Staff for this publication

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The 104th Place Houses

Annexed to the city in 1890, the Beverly community is a neighborhood that has maintained its suburban character over the last ninety years. A major feature of the area is a ridge fifty to eighty feet high that was formed more than 13,000 years ago during the last glacial period in Chicago. This topographical feature was a major influence in the development of Beverly and its neighboring community, Morgan Park. Beginning in the late 1880s and continuing through the 1920s, property owners along the ridge took advantage of this feature and built large homes on spacious lots, extending down to Longwood Drive which parallels the ridge. Because of its unique topography and the variety of architectural styles illustrated here, Longwood Drive today is one of the most impressive residential streets in Chicago.

Serious development of the community began as a direct result of improved transportation. Small communities flourished along the tracks that had been constructed by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad (now the Rock Island Railroad) east of the ridge in 1852. One of these communities, Tracy, developed near 103rd Street (originally called Tracy Avenue) just east of the railroad tracks. In the first decade of the twentieth cen-

Built in 1911, this home is typical of the builders' houses erected on 104th Place. These houses were built by contractors from plans popularized in building magazines of the time.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

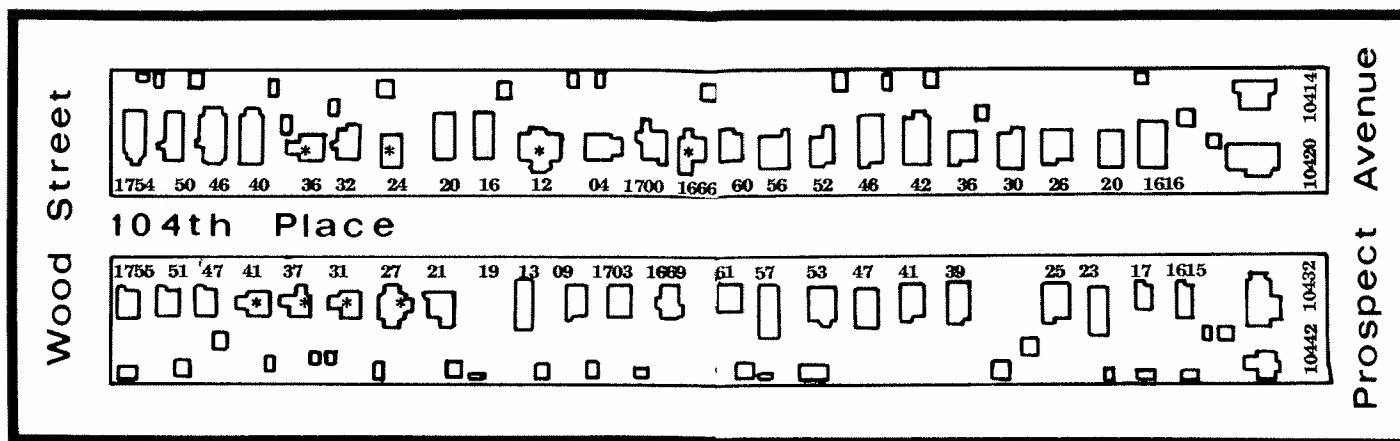


tury, property owners in Tracy started subdividing land into fifty-foot parcels and building and selling small houses. The block of 104th Place between Prospect Avenue and Wood Street exemplifies this pattern of development.

Many of the houses on 104th Place are builders' houses; that is, houses that were built for contractors from plans popularized in such magazines as the *National Builder* and *The House Beautiful*. Generally, architects were not employed to customize the designs because the houses were built for future sale or rental. The houses employ balloon-frame construction, a building technique invented in Chicago in the 1830s that substituted lightweight pre-cut boards (usually 2" x 4") joined by machine-made nails, for the heavier timbers of traditional frame construction which required the services of a skilled carpenter to cut the lumber and form the joints. The new process proved to be a quick and efficient means of construction, well suited to speculative development. Most of the 104th Place houses do not fall into the stylistic categories of the larger homes found along Longwood Drive but instead employ an amalgam of popular features: thin clapboard siding, side porches, quaint gable roofs, dormers, and classical detailing. The homes are typical of Midwestern architecture at the turn of the century. In their scale and simplicity and in the quality of materials employed in their construction they enhance the setting of the Prairie houses located on the block.

A number of homes on 104th Place were built by Russell L. Blount, a developer and contractor. Eight of the homes constructed by him are examples of Prairie school architecture, and seven of them were built from designs by the architect Walter Burley Griffin. The first of the Prairie residences was built in 1910 at 1712 West 104th Place for Blount and his wife. Blount's decision to build rather than buy a house might have been influenced by the fact that his father-in-law owned undeveloped land on the north side of 104th Place between Wood Street and Prospect Avenue, affording the couple their choice of several potential building sites. In addition, Blount, who was then real estate manager for a downtown bank, had an interest in land development and home construction. As a result, when Blount commissioned Walter Burley Griffin to design the house, he went to Griffin not only as a client but as the contractor for the house as well. Before construction was completed, Edmund Garrity, president of the National Plumbing and Heating Company, offered Blount a substantial sum of money for the house. Blount accepted the offer and sold the house to Garrity. The Garrity house is a one-and-a-half story structure with a decidedly horizontal emphasis. Its dark-stained molding at the base and the horizontal strips of wood defining the window level enhance the horizontality. Dormers were added to the front and rear of the roof by a subsequent owner. With his first success as a developer, albeit unintentional, and still in need of a house for himself and his wife, Blount secured two more plans from Griffin in 1910.

One of the houses built from these plans is located at 1724 West 104th Place. The Blounts resided there for almost three years. This two-story house, larger than the



Map of the 104th Place District. The Prairie school homes built by Blount are indicated by asterisks (*). With the exception of the

home at 1737 104th Place, all of the Prairie houses on the block were built from plans by Walter Burley Griffin.

Garrity residence, is basically a cube that originally had a broad enclosed terrace and wide overhanging eaves. A fire extensively damaged the house, and although subsequent remodeling resulted in alterations to the original design, the exterior still reflects Griffin's basic concept. The second of the two houses erected by Blount in 1910 from Griffin's plans was built for rent or sale at 1666 West 104th Place. A salesman named Harry Van Nostrand rented the house from July, 1911 until June, 1912 and bought it in 1916. With its rectangular shape, gable roofs, and the placement of its porch at a right angle to the main portion of the structure, the Van Nostrand house is similar in appearance to the Garrity residence. As in the case of the Garrity house, the original design has been altered by the addition of a dormer to the front roof. The Blount and the Van Nostrand houses were completed in the spring of 1911.

The following year, Blount commissioned Griffin to

design a house for a client to be built at 1950 West 102nd Street. During construction of the house, however, the agreement between Blount and his client was cancelled, leaving the house vacant upon completion. By 1914, Blount had been unable to rent or sell the property and decided to move from his house on 104th Place into the new residence on 102nd Street.

Despite this experience, Blount built another house for speculation in 1913. This house, at 1736 West 104th Place, was also designed by Griffin. Shortly after it was finished, the house was rented for one year to Walter Salmon who bought it in 1917. The original design for the Salmon house is virtually unaltered. It rises from a base of wood siding that extends to the bottom of the first-floor windows. The stucco walls are divided by stained wood strips into a rectilinear pattern which emphasizes the geometry of the total design. On the west side, an open two-story porch relieves the cube-like form of the house.

The Van Nostrand house at 1666 West 104th Place. The extensive use of dark-stained wood trim on this and other Prairie school houses on the block help to unify them with the landscape. (Timothy Barton, photographer)



Detail of the Van Nostrand house. (Barbara Crane, photographer)

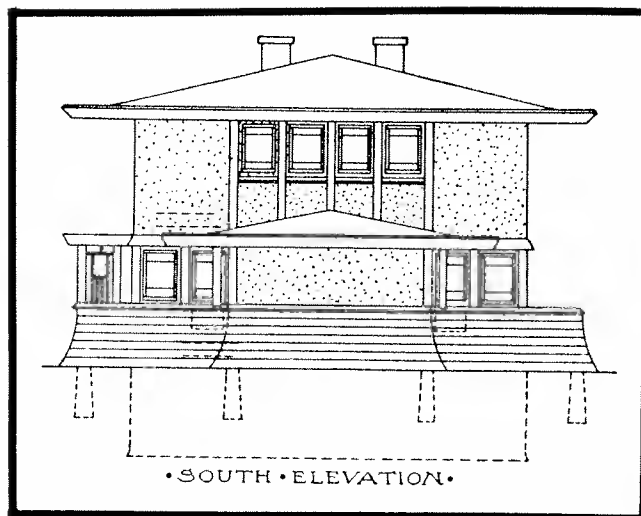


Another Griffin-designed residence was built in 1913 at 1727 West 104th Place. Because Blount did not own this land, the house cannot be considered one of his speculative ventures. However, Blount was involved with the construction of the house through his association with its contractor, the Tracy Ridge Construction Company. The house was built for Arthur Jenkinson who moved into it in 1914. The Jenkinson house is one of the least altered of the houses built by Blount. Its materials are those employed in the other Prairie houses on the block, yet this two-story house differs markedly in the treatment of the siding on the lower portions of the wall. The siding on the Jenkinson house becomes a major decorative device; it is used here more extensively than on any of Griffin's other works. This effect has led to speculation by architectural historian Paul Sprague that Griffin did not supervise construction of the Jenkinson house and that his original design may have been altered during construction.

Given the circumstances of another project Griffin was working on at the time, it would not be surprising if Griffin had not supervised the construction of the Jenkinson house. During the period that Blount was working with Griffin, the architect was involved in an international competition for the design of Canberra, a new city planned as the capital of Australia. Griffin won the competition in 1912 and travelled to Australia the following year. He returned to the United States late in 1913 in order to arrange his personal and business affairs before departing in 1914 to settle permanently in Australia. Griffin turned over his remaining projects in this country to the architect Barry Byrne whom Griffin had known when both were employed in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park studio.

Four more Griffin-like houses, two of which were constructed on 104th Place, were built in Beverly between June, 1913 and September, 1914. All of these houses derive from designs Griffin had previously done for Blount. For his own reasons, Blount, or an architect retained by him, apparently reworked the earlier designs to produce plans from which more Prairie residences could be built. In 1913, Blount acquired vacant property at 1741 West 104th Place and supervised construction of the two-story stucco and frame residence that he sold to Harry Furneaux in March, 1914. The design for this house was based on the Salmon house across the street at 1736 but with some variations. Its wood siding reaches above the first-floor windows rather than stopping at the bottom of the sills as in the design for Salmon. Blount also used triangular brackets to support the roof of the Furneaux residence whereas none are employed in the Salmon design. The most obvious difference between the two structures is the two-story porch topped by a pitched roof on the Salmon house; the Furneaux has a one-story porch covered by a flat roof.

Approximately seven months after construction had started on the Furneaux house, William N. Clarke commissioned the home at 1731 West 104th Place and hired the Tracy Ridge Construction Company to build it. The house is based on the design Griffin gave Blount for the construction of the Van Nostrand house. The Clarke house has the same floor plan as the Van Nostrand house; however, because of the narrowness of the lot, the axis



Drawing showing the original facade of the Blount house.
(from *Modern American Homes*, published in 1912)

has been shifted and the porch placed on the side opposite the entrance. A dormer on the east side of the structure was added later. By the fall of 1914, Blount was involved with the construction of two other Griffin-like houses on the block north of 104th Place: the Ida Williams house at 1632 West 104th Street and the home for William R. Hornbaker at 1710 West 104th Street. Both of these houses were based on the Van Nostrand design.

Blount built one more Prairie school house on 104th Place. It was designed by the firm of Spencer and Powers, associates of Griffin from Steinway Hall, a downtown office building where they and Griffin had offices. Griffin may have recommended Spencer and Powers to Blount because his own work on the Canberra project probably would have prevented him from taking on any new commissions. The house, which is at 1737 West 104th Place, was designed late in 1912 and construction was completed in the middle of the following year. Blount sold the house to Harry Newland later that same year. This house differs from those based on Griffin's schemes in the way the wood siding takes on a more dominant role in the overall design.

The ground-floor plans for the Griffin-designed houses are all based on "A Fireproof House for \$5,000," a design for an inexpensive house that was published by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the April, 1907 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The article indicated that the house was fireproof because concrete was used for the exterior walls rather than wood siding as was common at the time. The major expense of concrete construction was the use of wooden molds in which the concrete was cast, and to minimize the cost, Wright proposed to reuse a single form as often as possible. The result was a house where all four sides have the same dimensions, creating an essentially cubic form. The exterior shape dictated the use of a square interior plan. In her unpublished thesis on the \$5,000 fireproof house building type, the architectural historian Alice Sinkevitch noted that "the real triumph of the design is the plan, the ultimate reduction of the ideal



The Jenkinson house (*left*) at 1727 West 104th Place and the Clarke house (*center*) at 1731 West 104th Place were based on plans drawn by Griffin for other homes on the block. The Newland house (*right*) at 1737 West 104th Place was designed by the firm of Spencer and Powers. These homes were built by Blount in 1913 and 1914, when Griffin, due to his involvement in the competition for the design of Canberra, Australia, was no longer able to work for Blount.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

floor plan Wright described in his autobiography: 'I declared the whole lower floor as one room, cutting off the kitchen as a laboratory. . .'. Ms. Sinkevitch notes the innovation whereby "the space unfolds in a circular motion around the fireplace. Although simple and compact, the space defies the visual grasp; at no point in either room is the entire space visible." The living and dining rooms in the plan form a continuous L-shaped space with a central fireplace. Only the enclosed kitchen is separated from this flow of space.

None of the homes based on the \$5,000 fireproof house scheme were built of poured concrete because the cost of the forms was prohibitive in such a small project. Nevertheless, the design represents Wright's attempt to incorporate into a small inexpensive house those characteristics that distinguished Prairie houses, including the low, broad chimney; the flat or gently hipped roof; the central fireplace around which the interior spaces are arranged; the outside walls firmly anchored to the ground by a low cement platform; and a continuous band of casement windows under wide eaves. The integration of these concepts into a moderately priced house proved successful, and the design was the basis for many subsequent projects of Wright and other Prairie school architects, including Walter Burley Griffin.

While the plans for the Griffin houses owe much to

Wright, their exteriors show Griffin's distinctive approach to Prairie school designs. All of the houses are somewhat rustic in appearance: unplanned wood trim is used against stucco walls. Different treatments of the dark-stained wood that defines door and window openings help make each house distinct. The bases of the houses vary as well. While all have wood siding, providing a visual transition between the concrete foundation and the stucco walls, this siding is a different height on each house. Another distinguishing characteristic of the facades is the placement of the porch which helps to relieve the cube-like form of several of the houses. Roof forms provide another source of variation, and the detailing under the eaves reinforces the geometric quality of Griffin's designs.

The Prairie houses on 104th Place came out of the same context as the other houses on the block. Costing between \$3,000 and \$5,000, most of the homes were built for middle-class clients. The builders' cottages and the Prairie homes are also alike in their balloon-frame construction. Most importantly, the homes share a distinctive architectural scale that, while allowing for a diversity of styles, results in a pleasing visual cohesiveness and rhythm. While the concentration of Prairie homes on 104th Place makes this block unique in Chicago, the other houses provide a framework in which the development of the Prairie houses can be understood.

From the 1880s until the years immediately following the first World War, architects in Chicago and its metropolitan area produced innovative designs that brought, and continue to bring, international acclaim to the city and to these architects. Many of the commercial buildings erected by such firms as Jenney and Mundie, Burnham and Root, Adler and Sullivan, and Holabird and Roche are outstanding examples of the style of architecture that has become known as the Chicago school. The term "Chicago school," however, originally applied to a group of Chicago-area architects who began to experiment with designs for residential architecture in the 1890s. The architect and critic Thomas Tallmadge was the first to define the work of these architects as a cohesive school when he wrote an article for the April, 1908 issue of *The Architectural Record*:

It is the resolve to be justified by their works and not by faith that distinguishes the present body of Chicago men whom we have classed together as the "Chicago School". . . The work has not yet crystallized into any set grammar, though there is a strong tendency manifesting itself to accept certain forms; for instance, the strong horizontal treatment in preference to the vertical—an absolute result of the inspiration of the prairie. . . The small suburban house, always the best thing in America that we have done in architecture, has naturally lent most willingly to the new manner in Chicago.

These designs, the most important of which were built between 1900 and 1917, have subsequently been labeled by historians as the "Prairie school." The term Prairie school is appropriate because the horizontality that characterizes the style reflects the horizontality of the Midwest prairie. Indeed, many of the Prairie school architects evoked the prairie image in their writings. Frank Lloyd Wright, the best known architect of the Prairie movement, wrote of its influence:

We of the Middle West are living on the prairie. The prairie has a beauty of its own and we should recognize and accentuate this natural beauty, its quiet level. Hence, gently sloping roofs, low proportions, quiet sky lines, suppressed heavy-set and sheltering overhangs, low terraces, and out-reaching walls sequestering private gardens.

Another architect associated with the group was Irving K. Pond who, writing in 1918, characterized the school as follows:

In imitation of a certain broad and horizontal disposition of lines individually employed, a school of design has sprung up, for which its authors claim the title "American." The horizontal lines of the new expression appeal to the disciples of this school as echoing the spirit of the prairies of the great Middle West, which to them embody the essence of democracy.

Most Prairie designs were built in Oak Park, River Forest, Evanston, and other Chicago suburbs, their spacious lots being especially conducive to the long, low forms of the

style. At the time Prairie designs were popular, large portions of Chicago and its suburbs were undeveloped and could still be considered part of the Midwest plains, and the proximity of those plains was no doubt a major determinant of the visual characteristics of the style.



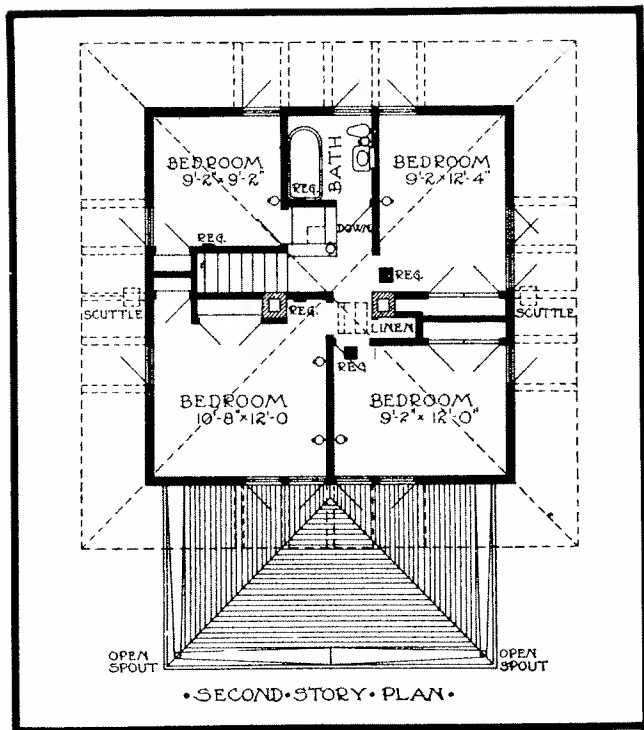
The house at 1703 West 104th Place (above), built in 1910, and the Blount house at 1724 West 104th Place (below), built in 1911, are alike in their size and scale and in their use of balloon-frame construction.

(Timothy Barton, photographer)

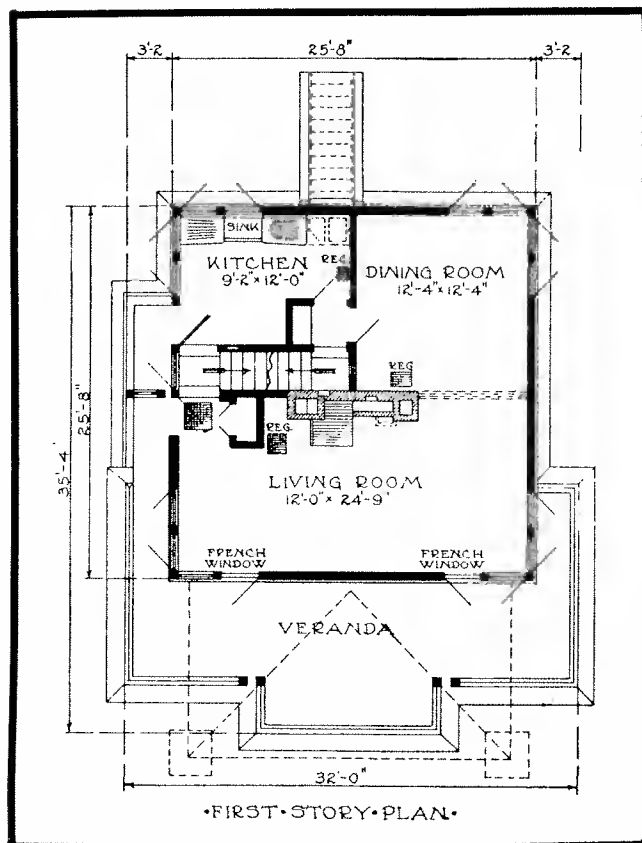


The Midwestern terrain was only one influence on Prairie architecture: the Shingle style, a variant of picturesque Queen Anne architecture, was another. The most innovative feature of the Shingle style was the free-flowing floor plan that did away with the rigid separations between rooms prevalent in nineteenth-century homes. The use of such open floor plans in Shingle style designs, as well as the overall horizontality resulting from the arrangement of windows and the placement of shingles in horizontal bands, prefigure the employment of these elements in Prairie designs.

Prairie designs are also suggestive of Japanese architecture. Such characteristics as the deep overhanging



The original floor plans for the Blount house. Despite their compactness, the Prairie homes on 104th Place have spacious first floor plans. The L-shaped configuration of the living and dining rooms is based on a design by Frank Lloyd Wright. (from *Modern American Homes*, published in 1912)



eaves, which help to modify heat and light inside the house as well as affording protection from rain and snow, and the use of simple, unsculptured wood trim both inside and outside the house, are elements reminiscent of traditional Japanese architecture.

Prairie houses have several distinctive characteristics that, although not found in every design, constitute the basic elements of the style. Brick or a combination of wood and plaster were the building materials most commonly used. The materials were sometimes combined in a single design but were never interspersed. Brick was employed on the ground story while the combination of wood and plaster was used above. Geometric forms are found throughout all aspects of interior and exterior design. Many of the houses have a distinct horizontality resulting from the long line of a low hipped roof and reinforced by the placement of dark wood trim under the roof line and below the windows. Bands of casement windows, many of which are filled with art glass depicting geometric abstractions of plant forms, also contribute to the overall horizontality.

The interior of Prairie houses are notable for their open floor plans, with a centrally located fireplace around which the interior space flows. The open layout is a result of wide openings between rooms and, according to the architectural historian Grant Mason, "the subdivision of interior space by suggestion rather than partition." Strips of wood molding and half walls define spaces without actually separating them, reinforcing the openness of the plans. Casement windows opening outward add to the feeling of spaciousness and link the interior with the outside environment.

Historical ornament based on classical architecture was anathema to the Prairie movement. The spiritual leader of the school was Louis Sullivan who shared a similar distaste for classical elements and developed a personal style of ornament for the commercial buildings he designed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was Sullivan's student, Frank Lloyd Wright, who was the central figure in the Prairie school. Other architects whose work is identified with the movement are Robert Spencer, George Grant Elmslie, William Purcell, Hugh Garden, Richard Schmidt, Dwight Perkins, George Nimmons, Thomas Tallmadge, Vernon Watson, William Drummond, Barry Byrne, Marion Mahoney, and Walter Burley Griffin.

The career of Walter Burley Griffin has been overshadowed by that of his contemporary, Frank Lloyd Wright, due in large part to Griffin's departure in 1914 for Australia. Griffin's contributions to the Prairie school, however, were significant and influential on the architectural work of his contemporaries.

Griffin was born in the Chicago suburb of Maywood on November 24, 1876 and raised in Oak Park. After graduating from Oak Park-River Forest High School, Griffin studied architecture at the University of Illinois. His studies also included courses in horticulture, forestry, and landscape architecture. Shortly after his graduation in 1899, Griffin joined a group of architects in the Steinway Hall office building in Chicago.

Steinway Hall (now demolished) was an office and theater building at 64 East Van Buren Street. Completed in 1896, it was the first major work of architect Dwight

Perkins. Perkins rented loft space at the top of the building and offered to share the space with other architects. Within a short period of time, Perkins was joined by Robert Spencer, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Myron Hunt. According to the architectural historian H. Allen Brooks, "it was a lively association, with all participating in each other's work. Sometimes they formally collaborated. . . How many times these men worked together cannot be known, yet certainly none worked in isolation." The relationship among the architects was unique and unquestionably significant in the development of Prairie school designs.

Griffin remained at Steinway Hall for two years before leaving to work for Wright at the studio Wright had established in Oak Park in 1895. Wright maintained a downtown office through 1912, but the Oak Park studio was his principal place of work. The studio was much like Steinway Hall in its informal organization which promoted a sense of camaraderie among the employees. Serving as the office manager and as construction supervisor for many of Wright's designs, Griffin was an important member of the studio. In *The Prairie School*, H. Allen Brooks comments on Griffin's significance to the studio in general and to Wright in particular, stating that Griffin "served as a useful critic, a lens through which Wright could re-examine his own ideas." In addition to Griffin, other architects employed by Wright at the studio were Marion Mahoney (whom Griffin married in 1911), John Van Bergen, Barry Byrne, and William Drummond. The years at the studio gave Wright and his employees the opportunity to integrate each other's ideas into their respective designs.

A photograph of Walter Burley Griffin.
(Courtesy of Prairie Avenue Bookshop)



The Emery house (1902) in Elmhurst, Illinois was an important design in Griffin's early career. It employs features found in the 104th Place houses including the high pitched gable roofs, the dark-stained wood detailing under the eaves, and the placement of rooms at right angles to the main axis of the structure.
(Richard Nickel, photographer. Courtesy of the Richard Nickel Committee)

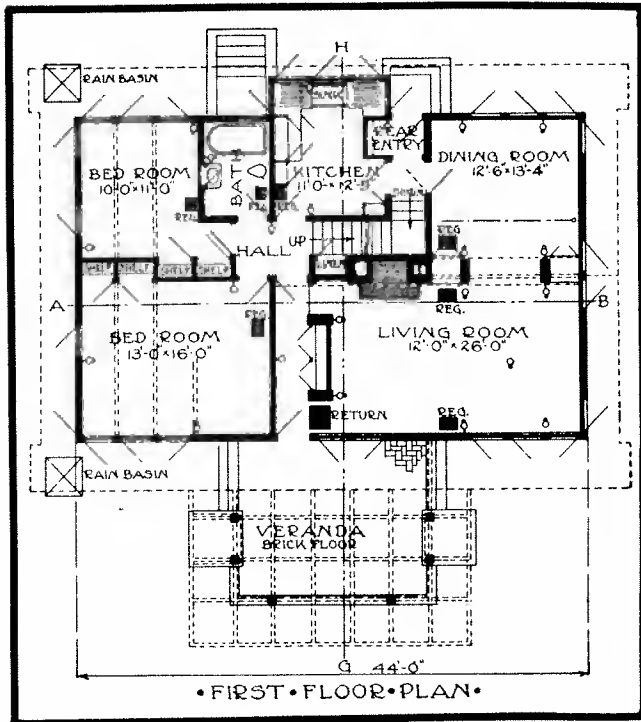
In 1902, while working for Wright, Griffin received his first major commission which was a house for William H. Emery in Elmhurst. It is an exceptional design, especially considering that Griffin was only twenty-five years old at the time, and it illustrates several characteristics prevalent throughout Griffin's Prairie school work. The first floor is faced with red brick and has large brick piers accentuating the corners of the house. The massiveness of the ground story is relieved by the combination of wood and off-white stucco on the second story. The gables that top the structure and the wood trim under the gable are evidence of the influence of Japanese architecture on Griffin's work. The design for the Emery house was an important one to the development of Griffin's personal style, and the influence it had on the works of other Prairie school architects indicates the importance of Griffin's contribution to the Prairie movement.

In 1905, Wright traveled to Japan for a three-month trip, leaving Griffin in charge of the studio. Following Wright's return, a series of disputes arose between the two men which resulted in Griffin's departure from the Oak Park studio. He returned to Steinway Hall where he again shared loft space with other Prairie school architects and where, two years later, he opened his own office.

Most of the commissions that Griffin received were for private residences. These commissions permitted him to develop the unique approach to the Prairie style that he had begun with the design of the Emery house. For many of the commissions, Griffin gave considerable attention to the landscape planning as well. His interest in landscape design and his theories on urban planning led him to accept commissions for the planning of several sub-

divisions as well as designing the homes for them. Unfortunately, few of these projects were begun and none were finished, due largely to the architect's emigration to Australia.

What Griffin's role would have been in the evolution of American architecture, had he matured in his profession in the United States, is a matter for speculation. The homes Griffin designed on 104th Place are an indication of how he might have furthered the attempt to bring the Prairie style into the mainstream of American architecture.



The Garrity house is a 1½-story stucco and wood residence. Its floor plan incorporates the same L-shaped room configuration for the living and dining rooms that is found in the other Prairie houses.

(Above: *Modern American Homes*, published in 1912; below: Barbara Crane, photographer)



The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from those qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. As part of this study, the Commission's staff prepares detailed documentation on each potential landmark. This public information brochure is a synopsis of various research materials compiled as part of the designation procedure.



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